

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:14 a.m. at the Pinellas Marine Institute.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on Arrival on the South Lawn

September 24, 1993

The President. I was asked on the way out of Florida this morning to make a comment on the Court of Appeals decision involving NAFTA, where the Court of Appeals reversed the trial court and said, in effect, that NAFTA does not have to have an environmental impact statement. First, I applauded the decision. And second, I want to emphasize that if this agreement goes through, it will lead to improvements in the environment and increased investment on the Mexican side of the border in environmental cleanup.

I also would like to say, based on the cause and conversations that I have been having with Members of Congress, I'm beginning to feel a little bit better about this agreement. I think that more and more Members of Congress who actually listen to the arguments, pro and con, understand that the overwhelming majority of the arguments against NAFTA are complaints about things that have already happened under the existing law, all of which NAFTA will make better.

NAFTA will raise wages more quickly in Mexico than if we don't adopt it. It will raise environmental spending more in Mexico than if we don't adopt it. It will reduce illegal immigration more in Mexico than if we don't adopt it. And it will plainly lead to more high-tech jobs, high-wage jobs in this country. And also I think more of our Members of Congress understand that NAFTA stands for, in the minds of the rest of the market-oriented countries of Latin America a desire on the part of the United States to have a hemispheric trading bloc, which everyone believes will lead to more jobs and higher incomes in America; that is, NAFTA is the beginning, after which you can look at Chile, at Venezuela, at Argentina, at other of the market-oriented economies in Latin America. These things, I think, are beginning to sink in, and

I'm very hopeful that we're going to be making some more progress. I think we are.

South Africa

Q. Mr. President, on another subject, Nelson Mandela today called for an end to the sanctions on South Africa. I know you've followed this issue closely for many, many years. Is the United States now prepared, are you prepared to lift the sanctions?

The President. When Mr. Mandela was here with President de Klerk, we talked about this. And then I've talked with him on the phone since he was here. And I'm looking forward to doing it again. Obviously the United States is going to be heavily influenced by the remarkable turn of events in South Africa, by the continued commitment on the part of the people of South Africa to move to a multiracial democracy. And so I will be very influenced, obviously, by what Mr. Mandela says. But I'll have a statement about that——

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, when you go to the United Nations on Monday, can you tell us what you'll tell them about your feelings concerning Bosnia?

The President. Tune in Monday. I don't want to give the speech today.

Support for Russia

Q. Mr. President, regarding the situation in Moscow, President Yeltsin now is clearly threatening to use force, if necessary, to disarm his opponents in the Parliament. Does that affect your attitude towards the situation in there, your support for Yeltsin?

The President. My support has not been affected by anything that has happened thus far. It is a difficult situation. I don't think we should attempt to quarterback every move from the United States. And I don't think I have anything else to say about it yet.

Anticrime Legislation

Q. Mr. President, there are a lot of people who are asking, after your comments this morning on the nexus between violence and medical costs, what your crime policies are really doing to make a change in this other than just support for gun control?

The President. Well, I've got a crime bill up there that goes far beyond support for the Brady bill and for a restriction on automatic weapons—I mean, assault weapons, although I favor both those very strongly. We also, through the crime bill and several other initiatives, are attempting to put more police officers on the street, to support boot camps and other alternative forms of punishment for young people to try to steer them away from a life of crime, and to support improvements in the criminal justice system itself to make punishment more swift and more sure.

But if you look at the crime bill, if you look at the effort to put more police officers on the street and to support community policing, and if you look at the effort to provide boot camps and alternative forms of punishment and pass the Brady bill and pass some limits on these semi-automatic assault weapons, that's a pretty broad-based anticrime strategy. I hope that the Congress will act on it and act on it this year.

NAFTA

Q. Mr. President, some people have expressed the view that NAFTA constitutes a kind of an unfortunate obstacle to you in political terms with all the focus that will be needed to pass the health care reform. How do you see the politics of the two issues fitting or not fitting together?

The President. I disagree with that, because, first of all, let's look at what has to happen now on health care reform. We're going to do one more round of intensive consultations, then we'll have some legislation to send to the Hill that embodies the principles I discussed with the American people. There will be other bills. They will go to the committees, and then we will begin the careful and exhaustive process of reviewing this.

Meanwhile, NAFTA is on a much faster time track. The trade agreement has to be turned into legislation within a limited period of time by the Congress. And then there's a limited period of time for debate. So I will be spending a significant amount of time everyday calling Members of Congress in both parties trying to line up support and working on other people like Mr. Iacocca, to try to get them to speak out for us and working on bringing people into this debate who are

selling things to Mexico and people whose jobs depend on it to show that it's a job winner as well as trying to illustrate to the Congress that the great benefits of NAFTA may well lie in its ability to be expanded to the rest of Latin America.

So I've got a big agenda. And the NAFTA issue will be over before too long. That is, under the fast track legislation on trade agreements, there is a fixed amount of time we have to do it. We're either going to do it or not. It'll be over—the health care debate is on a different timetable. So I don't see them conflicting now. We just had to get the health care debate started, or we never would have finished it.

Health Care Reform

Q. Mr. President, on health care reform, if you end up underestimating the cost of your plan, are you calling for a formal annual review mechanism that would allow for tax increases or benefit cuts, if necessary, in order to meet your target?

The President. What I think we should do is we should have an annual review process which would permit us, if we don't realize the savings through management we intend to realize, to make a decision to phase in some of the newer benefits over a longer period of time. That would control what we do—or to present them as options that can be paid for separately at the decision of the consumer until the savings enable us to phase them in completely.

I do not believe—I will say again—I do not believe you can justify taking the world's most expensive and bureaucratic system in which most Americans who have insurance pay more than they should, under any conceivable model that they'd be in, anyone besides this one, and ask them to pay taxes on top of that to pay for the uninsured. We have got to manage this system to make it simpler, to achieve the savings without sacrificing choice and quality. We can plainly do it. We know it's been done in Germany, just to take one other example. We know it's been done several places in the United States. And the administration is happy to carry the burden into these congressional hearings of demonstrating the evidence that it can be done. But if it doesn't happen just as it should, then

what should happen is we should phase the benefits in more slowly or present them as options that can be paid for. We shouldn't raise general taxes on people who are already paying too much for their own health care to pay for somebody else's health care who's not paying anything for it. I just don't think that's right.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to former Chrysler Corp. chairman Lee Iacocca.

Statement on Lifting Economic Sanctions Against South Africa
September 24, 1993

I welcome the call today by ANC President Nelson Mandela for the lifting of economic sanctions against South Africa. This call from this courageous man who has been one of the principal victims of apartheid means that the leading groups in South Africa now oppose the maintenance of economic sanctions on their country.

Yesterday's action by the South African Parliament to create a Transitional Executive Council (TEC) and today's announcement by the ANC are watershed events in the history of South Africa and its movement toward a nonracial democracy. South Africans of all races can be proud of these momentous achievements. Americans can also take pride in the role they have played through government, churches, unions, universities, activist groups, and businesses throughout America to protest the apartheid system.

We must now respect the judgment of the leaders of South Africa and move to lift our remaining economic sanctions. We will be taking steps necessary to permit lending to South Africa from the International Monetary Fund. I welcome the introduction and passage of legislation in the Senate to lift the other remaining sanctions at the Federal level and hope the House can move rapidly on the legislation as well. I also urge States, counties, and cities to move quickly to lift their sanctions.

But removing sanctions will not be enough. Americans who have been so active in breaking down the pillars of apartheid

must remain committed to helping build the nonracial market democracy that comes in its wake. For this reason, I have asked that Commerce Secretary Ron Brown lead a trade and investment mission to South Africa to explore business opportunities, particularly with South Africa's black private sector. We will offer an OPIC investment encouragement agreement and propose negotiations for a bilateral tax treaty. We will consider the possibility of initiating a Peace Corps program in South Africa.

I urge private companies, investment fund managers, universities, labor unions, and other Americans to take advantage of opportunities for trade and investment in South Africa and to use their fullest talents to assist South Africa's historic transition to democracy.

Message on the Observance of Yom Kippur, 1993
September 24, 1993

My heartfelt greetings to all who are observing Yom Kippur in this momentous year of history and hope.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a holy day that provides the opportunity to seek forgiveness and to enter the new year with a clean conscience and a clear purpose. It is a chance to seek pardon and to ask divine guidance for self-improvement. Yom Kippur emphasizes the importance of honoring the memories of loved ones no longer living, but still remembered. Above all, Yom Kippur recognizes the need to repair personal relationships—relationships with friends and family, with God, with those who live on in our memories, and with those for whom we may have previously felt animosity.

With the recent signing of the agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, this Yom Kippur is particularly significant. It is my wish that people of all cultures and faiths will pledge their active support and energy to help achieve a new era of peace and hope in the Middle East